

scores of publications, including one of the first serious books on women's issues in Bangladesh. He narrowly survived a machete assault by a group of thugs in 2004 after depicting both Islamist and nationalist extremists as objectionable characters in a recently published novel. Azad died six months later in Germany, where he had fled to escape further attacks.

In other cases, the infringement of scholars' rights takes place through the courts or other government institutions. For example, Hashem Aghajari, a history professor at Tarbiat Modarres University in Tehran was convicted of apostasy by a conservative regional court and sentenced to death in 2004 for presenting an academic paper in which he described Iranian clerical rule as inconsistent with the original teachings of Islam. Although the death sentence was eventually reversed by

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Iran's Supreme Court, Aghajari spent two years in jail and was only released after posting a sizable bail.

The well-known case of Egyptian scholar Nasr Hamid Abu-Zayd provides an example of how the Islamic legal system has been used in efforts to silence critical scholarship within the field of Islamic studies. Abu-Zayd, a former professor of Islamic studies at the University of Cairo, was put on trial by an Islamic Family Court after he published criticism of the relationship between contemporary Islamic discourse and what he called the "social and economic scandal" within Egypt's Islamic banking sector. The court declared Abu-Zayd an apostate on the grounds of his scholarly work on Qur'anic hermeneutics. It also successfully argued that it held the right to declare Abu-Zayd's marriage annulled, ostensibly to protect his Muslim wife from the sin of being married to a non-Muslim. As legal wrangling continued in his home country, Abu-Zayd and his wife immigrated to the Netherlands, where he now holds the Averroës Chair for Humanism and Islamic Studies at the University for Humanistics in Utrecht.

#### TRENDS

A growing trend concerning academic freedom in Muslim societies is an awareness of the need to address the persecution and intimidation of academics. Several human rights organizations are working to marshal support for scholars under threat. In particular, the Scholars at Risk Network coordinates a system through which universities can offer sanctuary to scholars. Extremely important for the individuals involved, such efforts also help to reveal academic freedom violations and encourage long-term advocacy efforts by members of the international academic community in a variety of fields.

Scholars in the Netherlands have brought academic freedom issues into focus recently through a series of symposia publications (e.g., William B. Drees and Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld, eds. *The Study of Religion and the Training of Muslim Clergy in Europe: Academic and Religious Freedom in the 21st Century*, 2008). Perhaps the most significant trend is growing concern about academic freedom within Islamic education circles. Resolutions drafted by Islamic educators at the International Seminar on Religious Curricula in the Muslim World held at the International Islamic University in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in September 2005 (<http://www.iiu.edu.my/iimu/info.php?inoid=26>) suggest mounting frustration with the intolerance expressed by some Islamic groups. Educators there asserted the idea of broadening religious curricula and promoting freedom of thought and expression, while at the same time discouraging discussion of differences among ideological and jurisprudential schools is paradoxical. For this reason, while such resolutions do reflect progress, they also suggest that the Justinian urge to establish orthodoxy continues to thrive. ■

## China's Private Universities: A Successful Case Study

RUTH HAYHOE AND JING LIN

*Ruth Hayhoe is professor in the Department of Theory and Policy Studies, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto; Jing Lin is professor in the Department of Educational Policy and Leadership, University of Maryland. Address: OISE/UT, 252 Bloor St. West, 6/F, Toronto, ON, Canada M5S 1V6. E-mail: hayhoe@bellsouth.net; jinglin@wam.umd.edu. See also <http://chinesehighereducation.org/>.*

As China has moved rapidly to mass higher education since its groundbreaking 1999 decision on expansion, private universities have come to account for about 6.6 percent of student enrollments, or about 1.34 million of the 20.2 million students enrolled in formal higher education in 2006. Major public universities have also contributed, not only by expanding their regular enrollments but also by setting up second-tier colleges, which are income-generating extensions, that benefit from the university's self-accrediting status and its qualified faculty. These effective private institutions have enrollments of 1.47 million students, around 7.3 percent of the total.

Given the advantaged position of second-tier colleges, how have independent private universities managed to compete? The case of Yellow River University of Science and Technology in Henan Province may provide some answers to this question. It was the first private university to enroll government-approved diploma students in 1994 and the first to enroll

degree students in 1999, with a rapid expansion of degree programs in response to the massification decision taken that year. By 2007, this university had 13,000 students enrolled in 37 degree programs, as well as another 5,000 in diploma and certificate programs and 1,500 in adult education programs. It was also cooperating with two top public universities, Tongji in Shanghai and Huazhong University of Science and Technology in Wuhan, to run a small number of master's degree programs. These numbers make it a leader among China's independent private universities, as only 24 are now accredited to run degree programs, with more than 1,250 others focusing on teaching at the subdegree level.

#### ORIGINS AND QUALITY OF STUDENTS

Seventy percent of the students at Yellow River come from Henan Province, with a population of 97 million, and the majority are from rural areas. Another 30 percent come from other parts of China. These students tend to have marks in the lower levels of the national entry examinations, and university leaders are well aware of the need to bolster their confidence and provide learning opportunities that emphasize practical and employment-related knowledge. Thus, niche areas have been developed such as television and radio broadcasting, advertising and design, engineering and construction geared to county-level technical employment needs, and music education oriented to self-employment. Student fees average at around 10,000 yuan, much higher than the average of 3,000 for public university programs in Henan, but lower than the 13,000 charged for second-tier colleges locally, also a competitive level for attracting students from outside the province. Students are given many opportunities for internships and student-organized activities on campus, while discipline is stricter than in public universities, and most live in campus dormitories closely supervised by counselors under the head of student affairs, who is also vice-secretary of the university's Communist Party Committee.

#### TEACHING AND RESEARCH

Attracting and keeping qualified faculty is a challenge for private universities, and Yellow River's faculty profile gives some insights into how this is done. With a full-time faculty of 800, and another 500 part-time teachers cross-appointed from other institutions, there is a faculty/student ratio of about 1:19. Senior faculty, including deans and department chairs, are mostly retired professors from public institutions, with sound qualifications and experience. Many younger faculty have been appointed with master's degrees from public universities and are given initial five-year contracts, with a promotion to lecturer possible after two years. In the autumn of 2006, for example, 130 new appointees had been attracted from a double cohort of graduating master's students, as China's master's degree programs had been reduced from three to two years. Some teachers with first degrees are appointed, often in recognition of relevant professional experience, but they are given

less favorable contracts.

From the university's founding, teaching excellence has been strongly emphasized, as essential to attracting students. At present, major efforts are going into teaching improvement, with experienced professors invited as consultants from outside and various supports for teaching enhancement being put in place. In June of 2008, the university will undergo its first formal teaching evaluation by the national Ministry of Education, an important milestone in public recognition, following the approval of an expanding number of degree programs. Teaching is the main focus of faculty work, and teaching loads are high, averaging 12 classes per week. Research is just beginning, with 19 projects recently registered with the

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provincial education bureau and the Henan Academy of Social Sciences. This is the way Yellow River has gained public approval for its research, in a situation where funding is provided internally. The 46 faculty members who developed these projects are rewarded with lowered teaching loads and expected to build a nascent research culture.

#### GOVERNANCE AND FINANCE

China's 1998 higher education law stipulates that universities are legal persons, and its 2003 law on *minban* (people-run) higher education states that "the government allows a reasonable return on private school investment." University property is owned by the institution, two large campuses in Yellow River's case, but many services may be separately incorporated and become a source of income. There is no direct government supervision over the budget, and the issue of profit, or a reasonable return on investment, remains a grey area. The 2002 law stipulates that a board of trustees is to oversee university governance, and Yellow River has recently established such a board, but its members consist mainly of internal leaders, including the president and several other founding members. While adhering to the law and claiming its protection is important, good relations with local government and political leaders are also seen as crucial. Thus the founding president became a Communist Party member in 1995 and established a Party Committee on the campus in 1997. She has also worked closely with family members in building up the university, appointing her daughter as executive vice-president, responsible for external affairs, and recently bringing her son back from a career in finance in the United States to serve as chief financial officer. This kind of family "responsibility system" is fairly common in China's private institutions.

Yellow River is not a typical private university, however, but

one of a very few with the kind of strong leadership that has made it a major player. Government policy has kept most in a subordinate position, where it is extremely difficult to compete with the second-tier colleges of public universities, and few are permitted to offer degree programs. ■

## Demand-Absorbing Private Institutions in Mexico

JUAN CARLOS SILAS

*Juan Carlos Silas is a PROPHE Affiliate and professor in the Department of Education at the Universidad de Monterrey, Monterrey, Mexico. E-mail: jsilas@udem.edu.mx.*

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Mexican higher education is very dynamic and has reshaped itself due to demographic, social, and political changes. The expansion of the country's most-rapid-growing subsector has included dramatic growth of enrollments and institutions, and diversification of institutions.

### THE DEMAND-ABSORBING SUBSECTOR

The term and basic characteristics of “demand-absorbing” were introduced in Daniel Levy’s pioneering study two decades ago. He found demand-absorbers to be academically flimsy, narrow, usually small, and not seeking prominence in the academic disciplines—quite nonelite. Compared to other institutions they are tuition based (though they charge less than other privates do), seldom receive donations, survive largely by hiring professors from public institutions interested in additional income, and hold operational costs to a minimum.

Some common elements foster the start-up of demand-absorbing institutions in Mexico and many other countries: a large unsatisfied demand from secondary education diploma-holders trying to further their education, insufficient regulation for limiting the development of lower-quality institutions, and financial constraints preventing public institutions from enhancing their intake of qualified students. It follows that in a context of high demand, lax regulation, and financial constraints, both the educational providers and students seeking an available place are forced to look for different options. The result of this quest includes the establishment of institutions offering vocational-like and affordable education that provides students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds the opportunity

to obtain a college degree.

### THE GROWTH OF THE SUBSECTOR

Empirical evidence links most demand-absorbing institutions to the diversification and growth of the private sector, which now contains about 16 percent of total Mexican enrollment. The diversification of institutions, models, and programs is related to the demographic pressure and a paradigm change about the functions of higher education that seems to give higher value to the development of professional and vocational skills linked to the job market. In the new programs and institutions, instruction does not measure up with the idea of university-like education and rather than professional educators requires practitioners knowledgeable about the practical profession and prepared to polish job-related skills. Demand-absorbing institutions appeal to students who select their institution and program of study according to their calculation of lesser perceived effort, opportunities for staying active in the labor market while studying, and expected return of time and money invested.

In the last 25 years, nonuniversity private higher education institutions have mushroomed, another trend found in other countries as well. One form occurs where organizations focus their programs on a specific area (communications sciences, psychology and psychotherapy, or gastronomy). A second form occurs where smaller institutions emerge, usually created by entrepreneurs and with a geographical coverage circumscribed to specific urban areas. These institutions offer traditional programs at a low cost and are usually directed to the service sec-

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tor of the economy. In Mexico and beyond, this expansion seems to be known and tolerated by national governments and educational systems as a way to provide low-income students with access to higher education.

### THE CURRENT DEMAND-ABSORBING SUBSECTOR

Data from the 2005/06 school year shows 87 percent of the private higher education institutions in Mexico constitute demand-absorbing ones. With 328,803 undergraduates they enroll almost half (48.5%) the students registered in the private sector and 16 percent of the national enrollment. Most of these institutions are small; 40 percent of them enroll 100 students or fewer. However, one can find eight institutions enrolling more than 5,000 students—one of which reports having more than 16,000 students at 33 sites.

Mexico’s contemporary demand-absorbing subsector relies on noncontract teaching personnel and a strong focus on *licen-*